



SENIORS AND FIRE: PRESERVING HISTORY

America's senior population has done so much to shape the future of our country. Groundbreaking advances in technology, health, and changes in societal views have taken place under their watch. Now is the time to invest in the future of America's seniors.

Did you know that, according to the United States Fire Administration, more than 1,200 Americans over the age of 65 die as a result of fire each year? Additionally, more than 3,000 older adults are injured each year in residential fires. In fact, seniors between the ages of 65 and 75 have a fire death rate twice that of the national average. Adults between 75 and 85 years old are three times as likely to die from fire and adults over 85 years old are four times as likely to die from fire. These staggering figures place adults over the age of 65 in one of the highest fire risk groups in the United States.

At a time when improving living conditions and health practices for the elderly population are a priority, how can America's seniors have such a high risk of death from fire? Seniors, especially in the early stages of retirement, tend to live relatively quiet lives with ease and independence. Their fire safety needs are simply being overlooked. While retired, many continue routines and activities that can eventually become life-threatening, for example, smoking. Tobacco products are used by 15% of the senior population and fires caused by smoking are the leading cause of fire deaths among the elderly. Cooking and home heating, everyday activities that we take for granted, are the second and third greatest contributors to their high risk of fire death. Older homes also contribute to the high fire deaths among seniors. More than two-thirds of America's seniors continue to live in the homes they moved into more than twenty years ago. Many of these homes have not been renovated to accommodate the electrical demands of new appliances or the lifestyle changes in the older adult resident. These activities can heighten seniors' risk for accidental injury and death from fire.

So, what is the best precaution against fire and where do seniors begin? Be prepared! Everyone, especially older adults, should ask himself or herself: Have I done everything possible to make my home fire-safe? Do I have smoke alarms on every level of my home? Have I updated and tested the batteries in my smoke alarms? Have I practiced my escape route in the last month? If the answer is "No" to any of these questions, the time to act is now.

{INSERT YOUR ORGANIZATION'S NAME} and the United States Fire Administration, an entity of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, offers seniors and their family members the following fire safety tips:

Before the Fire

Install Smoke Alarms and Replace Batteries - Install smoke alarms on every level of your home. A working smoke alarm more than doubles your chances of surviving a fire.

Batteries in smoke alarms should be changed once a year. Some homes are equipped with “hard-wired” smoke alarms that connect to the household electrical system and may have a battery backup. If you have a hard-wired smoke alarm that uses a back-up battery, change the battery yearly. Test each alarm monthly and use new batteries when replacing old ones.

Plan and Practice Escape Routes –USFA recommends developing and practicing home escape plans and planning them around individual capabilities. Have at least two exits from every room and be sure you know how to open your windows quickly in the event of an emergency.

During the Fire

Get Out and Stay Out – Leave your home immediately. Do not try to gather personal possessions or attempt to extinguish a fire.

Stay Low and Go – If you are physically able, crawl low and keep under the smoke. If not, try to cover your mouth to avoid breathing toxic fumes and make your way to safety as quickly as possible.

Fire Prevention

Smoking – Make sure that you are alert when you smoke and never smoke in bed. When you are finished smoking, soak the ashes in water before discarding them. Never leave smoking materials unattended, and collect them in large, deep ashtrays.

Cooking – Never leave the stove unattended while cooking. If you need to step away, turn it off. Also, wear tight-fitting clothing when cooking over an open flame, a dangling sleeve can catch fire easily. Keep towels and potholders away from the flame.

Heating – Install and maintain heating equipment correctly. Don’t store newspapers, rags, or other combustible materials near a furnace, hot water heater, or space heater. Never use a stove as a substitute for a furnace or space heater.

In all of my years {**WORKING WITH THE ELDERLY OR FIGHTING FIRES**}, I have seen first-hand how the death of an older family member and the loss of priceless family heirlooms can tear a family apart. The loss is even greater knowing that by spending a few minutes following recommended fire safety guidelines, that life could possibly have been saved. Let’s work to *Prevent Fires. Save Lives.*

{NAME AND TITLE}